

The Soldier's and Sailor's Sabbath.

ALL honor to the President of the United States for issuing the following General Order to the Army and Navy:

EXECUTIVE MANSION, WASHINGTON, Nov. 15, 1862.

The President, Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy, desires and enjoins the orderly observance of the Sabbath by the officers and men in the military and naval service. The importance for man and beast of the prescribed weekly rest, the sacred rights of Christian soldiers and sailors, a becoming deference to the best sentiment of a Christian people, and a due regard for the Divine Will, demand that Sunday labor in the army and navy be reduced to the measure of strict necessity. The discipline and character of the National forces should not suffer, nor the cause they defend be imperiled, by the profanation of the day or name of the Most High. "At this time of public distress," adopting the words of Washington in 1776, "Men may find enough to do in the service of God and their country, without abandoning themselves to vice and immorality." The first general order issued by the Father of his Country, after the Declaration of Independence, indicates the spirit in which our institutions were founded and should ever be defended:—"The General hopes and trusts that every officer and man will endeavor to live and act as becomes a Christian soldier, defending the dearest rights and liberties of his country."

ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

The incidents connected with this memorable act of the President are worthy of record, as indicating the concurrence of the people with their Chief Magistrate in his care for the physical and moral well-being of the Army and Navy. A public meeting of citizens from various parts of the Union was held at Saratoga, in August, 1862, at which the subject was considered, and the New York Sabbath Committee were requested "to communicate with our National and State authorities, civil and military; and to take such further measures as may tend to the preservation of the Christian Sabbath from needless profanation in the time of war." The Committee addressed a communication on the subject to the Governors of the several loyal States and to the public [See Doc. No. XXII]; but the importance of the subject in its National relations seemed to demand that it should be personally presented to the President. A deputation was accordingly appointed, consisting of the Chairman and Secretary of the Committee, with Messrs. David Hoadley, William A.

Booth, Fred. S. Winston, Fred. G. Foster and Gustav Schwab, who repaired to Washington, and on the 13th of November were honored with an interview in the Executive Chamber—the Secretaries of War and the Navy, Admiral Foote, Governor Morgan, the Hon. Peter Parker, and the Rev. Dr. Gurley being present.

Governor Morgan, of New York, introduced the deputation in a brief and cordial address.

Mr. Norman White, Chairman, stated succinctly the object of the deputation, assuring the President of the sympathy of the classes it represented, and of their daily entreaties for wisdom to be given him for the duties of his high office; and requested Mr. Russell S. Cook, Secretary, to read the following

ADDRESS TO THE PRESIDENT.

We wait on you, Mr. President, as a Deputation from the New York Sabbath Committee, in conformity with the request of a meeting of influential citizens from all parts of the country, held last August at Saratoga Springs, to promote the better observance of Sunday in the army and navy of which you are the honored Commander-in-Chief. To this end, we respectfully solicit your sanction of an appropriate general order protecting the rights of our brave soldiers and sailors to their weekly season of rest and worship—the emergencies of the service excepted; and recommending such use of sacred time as will best secure its sanitary, moral and religious benefits.

We deem it superfluous in this presence to discuss the civil or sacred relations of an institution as old as time and as prevalent as freedom and Christianity. We address the civil and military ruler of a Republic whose busy population weekly pause in their industrial pursuits and throng the temples of Christian worship, attesting their reverence for the Lord's day and its Author; and whose laws and customs reflect, as they have ever done, the popular appreciation of the national rest day. It is no unintelligent, superstitious principle that has moulded the legislation of more than thirty States of the Union, and stamped its impress on the character of the nation. The law of periodical rest is written on the human constitution, and on the frame-work of free, self-governing institutions, as indelibly as it is on the pages of revelation. A government of law must have its foundations in morality; its liberties inhere, under God, in its virtues. But it is the recorded axiom of the late Justice McLean: "Where there is no Christian Sabbath, there is no Christian morality; and without this, free institutions cannot long be sustained"—a sentiment impressively illustrated by the fact that the only free nations in existence are those in which the civil Sabbath is incorporated in their laws, as is the sacred Sabbath in their cherished convictions and habits.

The respected Attorney General of the United States has well defined the fundamental connection of the Sabbath with public morals, and so with regulated liberty. "The religious character," says Mr. Bates, "of an institution so ancient, so sacred, so lawful, and so necessary to the peace, the comfort, and the respectability of society, ought alone to be sufficient for its protection; but, that failing, surely the laws of the land, made for its account, ought to be as strictly enforced as the laws for the protection of person and property. Vice and crime are always progressive and cumulative. If the Sunday laws be neglected or despised, the laws of person and property will soon share their fate, and be equally disregarded." The

Deputation may be pardoned for alluding to the recent records of crime in New York city, as a striking confirmation of the Attorney-General's views. They show that the partial suppression of Sunday abuses and temptations resulted in a relative change of sixty-five per cent. in the arrests for violating "the laws of person and property," as compared with the period when "the Sunday laws were neglected or despised." The Deputation appeal to the results of our national system of moral discipline in the general supremacy of law and liberty throughout the Northern States, even in a time of civil war, as revealing at once the root and the fruits of the tree under whose shadow the Republic has sought its weekly repose and rendered its weekly homage.

Assuming, then, as we surely may, the President's patriotic and Christian respect for the Lord's day, we pass to the specific object of the Deputation.

In response to the call of the Government, nearly a million of citizens have become soldiers. They have been transferred from home, church and neighborhood influences, so fruitful in incitements to virtue and restraints from vice, and are exposed to the temptations of the camp and the fore-castle. The laws and habits of civil and domestic life are superseded by the military code and customs. It may be hoped that individuals, or entire commands, have borne the transition without injury to principle or character; but the tendency of these novel influences must be towards demoralization, and every available counteracting agency is demanded by the highest considerations of philanthropy, patriotism and religion.

It is due to the army and navy. The common right of soldiers and sailors to their weekly rest, unless abridged by military necessity, will not be questioned, nor the correlative duty to observe the day according to its design. But tens of thousands of men have enlisted into one or other branch of the national service from Christian churches, Bible-classes, Sunday-schools and religious homes—twenty-seven from a single Bible-class within our knowledge. We would vindicate the rights of these Christian men, and of all others who have moral sense enough to make good soldiers, to immunity from outrage of feeling or oppression of conscience in matters as sacred as life. They cherish, for example, a profound reverence for the name of God, and regard "profane cursing and swearing," as Washington did, as "a foolish and wicked practice"—"a vice so mean and low that every man of sense and character detests and despises it." They esteem the Sabbath as sacred to rest and devotion, and have been taught from infancy that "the observance of the holy day of the God of mercy and of battles is our sacred duty." They have been trained to devout reliance on the Divine arm in their exposure of life itself in defense of a just cause, and they recoil from the violation of Divine statutes, and from the wanton disregard of them by their companions-in-arms. They may justly claim such leadership and discipline as shall respect their most sacred convictions, when those convictions contain the elements of principled courage, unswerving obedience and undying patriotism. If any of their officers lack the tact, self-respect, or principle to recognize these claims, superior authorities should exact the recognition, as the simplest justice to the men and the most obvious requisite of military discipline. Immorality and irreligion will sufficiently abound, in spite of law and example. When these are lacking, the drift is fearful toward moral degeneracy and consequent military inefficiency.

The official intervention we seek is due to the country. The camp cannot become a school of vice without entailing irreparable injury on the numberless homes and hamlets represented in a vast volunteer army, nor without lasting damage to the morals, and so to the liberties, of the Republic. Nor

can the fact be overlooked that the cause itself for which the country and the army are contending is imperiled just in the measure in which impiety and immorality characterize its defenders and provoke the displeasure of Heaven.

It is conceded that the limit of official interposition in this matter is quite restricted. The rights of conscience are sacred. The exigencies of military service, too, must frequently overrule the choice of commanders and the natural rights of the soldier. But is there not a sphere within which the legitimate exercise of authority and moral influence may restrain the tendencies to evil that awaken alarm and grief among right-minded citizens?

The action we solicit might be mandatory so far as relates to needful weekly rest, the wanton invasion of Christian rights, and the choice of Sunday for aggressive warfare, due discretion being accorded to Generals commanding, under their responsibility to God and the Government. Beyond this, paternal counsels only might suffice to encourage the virtuous and self-respecting, and to bring into disrepute the lawless trifling of officers or men with sacred interests.

The records of our Revolutionary period furnish memorable precedents for the action we venture to suggest. Repeatedly did the Father of his Country address orders to the army, rebuking immorality, and encouraging purity of conduct as only befitting the holy cause for which they contended; and reminding officers and men, as we need to be reminded, that "we can have little hope of the blessing of Heaven on our arms, if we insult it by our impiety and folly."

The President responded briefly and cordially to the suggestions of the deputation, alluding to the fact that in concurrence with the Secretary of War, the army at Fredericksburg had, at their instance, and out of respect for the day, rested on the Sabbath, there being no immediate necessity for their movement, though ready for it. He expressed a desire to do all that was feasible to meet the views of the deputation, after consulting his cabinet. His appeal to Admiral Foote for his views on some practical question elicited from that scarred veteran an expression of his belief that the sailors would hail a Sunday order with gratitude, and that the Sabbath and its usual services formed a most valuable influence in naval discipline.

It is due to the President, Secretary Stanton, Secretary Welles, Admiral Foote and General Halleck, to state that their courteous bearing and their cordial appreciation of the object of the deputation, were worthy of the high positions they severally occupy in the civil, military and naval service of a Christian Republic.

It now remains for the officers and men in the army and navy, and for civilians of all ranks and conditions, to heed the paternal counsels of the President, which are, in substance, but the echo of that higher mandate of Infinite Wisdom and Love: "REMEMBER THE SABBATH DAY TO KEEP IT HOLY."

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